# UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF INDIANA INDIANAPOLIS DIVISION

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,	)	
Plaintiff,	)	
v.	)	Cause No. 1:19-cv-01937
\$40,020.00 UNITED STATES CURRENCY,	)	
Defendant.	)	

## **COMPLAINT OF FORFEITURE IN REM**

The United States of America, by counsel, Josh J. Minkler, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Indiana, and Eric P. Babbs, Special Assistant United States Attorney, alleges as follows:

## **NATURE OF THE ACTION**

1. This is a civil action seeking forfeiture of certain property pursuant to 21 U.S.C. § 881(a)(6) because the defendant property constitutes proceeds of, or is property used to facilitate, a violation of the Controlled Substances Act.

## **PARTIES, JURISDICTION, AND VENUE**

- 2. The defendant is Forty Thousand and Twenty Dollars and No Cents in United States Currency (\$40,020.00 or the "Defendant Currency"). The Defendant Currency was taken into custody of the United States Department of Homeland Security, Customs and Border Protection ("DHS-CBP"), and has been assigned Asset Identification Number 17-CBP-000188.
- 3. This Court has subject matter jurisdiction pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1345 (district courts have original jurisdiction of all civil actions commenced by the United States) and § 1355 (district courts have original jurisdiction of any action for forfeiture).

- 4. This Court has *in rem* jurisdiction over the defendant property pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1355(b) (forfeiture action can be brought in the district in which any of the acts giving rise to the forfeiture occurred), and Rule G(3)(b)(i) of the Supplemental Rules for Admiralty or Maritime Claims and Asset Forfeiture Actions (clerk must issue a warrant to arrest property in the government's possession).
- 5. This Court is the appropriate venue in this matter pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1395(a) and (b), in that the forfeiture accrued in the Southern District of Indiana.

#### **FACTS**

- 6. On March 14, 2017, officers from a parcel / bulk cash smuggling interdiction task force, comprised of the Indiana State Police ("ISP"), the Indianapolis Metropolitan Police Department ("IMPD"), and the Department of Homeland Security, Homeland Security Investigations ("DHS-HSI"), conducted an interdiction operation at a Federal Express shipping facility in Indianapolis.
- 7. Parcel / bulk cash smuggling interdiction operations are conducted because it has become common practice for smugglers to use shipping companies, such as Federal Express, to transport illegal controlled substances and their proceeds. Shipping companies provide illegal controlled substances smugglers with many benefits such as faster delivery with predictable dates, package tracking, and delivery confirmation. Based on information and experience, task force officers can easily identify suspicious packages with indicators, such as newly-bought boxes from the shipping company and excessive tape at the seams of the packages. Suspicious packages are typically sent via priority overnight shipping that has been paid for with cash. To preserve anonymity, smugglers often use falsified addresses, phone numbers, or names.

California) draw increased suspicion, as do those sent from individual to individual, from non-business sender to non-business receiver, and from residence to residence.

- 8. On March 14, 2017, during the parcel / bulk cash smuggling interdiction, task force officers isolated a suspicious package bearing tracking number 7858 9160 0160. The package stated on its shipping label that it was sent from Natasha Johnson, 462 Clearview Drive, Euclid, Ohio 44123, TX# 216-738-9209 to Joann Johnson, 1360 South Figueroa Street, Apartment 405, Los Angeles, California 90015, TX# 216-713-5556.
- 9. Task force officers selected the package for isolation because its appearance met the indicators of a package involved in bulk cash and controlled substance smuggling. Officers noted that the box had been newly bought from the shipping company and had excessive tape at its seams. The package was being sent via priority overnight shipping, had been paid for with cash, and had a destination in a known source state for illegal controlled substances. Further, it was being sent from an individual to an individual, from a non-business sender to a non-business receiver, and from a residence to a residence.



- 10. Law enforcement searches of the information provided on the shipping label revealed abnormalities. Neither the sender nor receiver were associated with the street addresses provided, though various individuals with the last name "Johnson" were found to be associated with several apartments at both addresses. There was no indication of familial or personal connection between these Johnsons and the sender or receiver. The phone numbers provided did not match the names on the shipping labels and were additionally suspect as they had the same area code even though the sender and recipient addresses were from alternate sides of the country. With no definitive way to positively identify either the shipper or the intended recipient, law enforcement officers were inclined to believe that the names listed were fictitious.
- 11. That same day, an IMPD officer and his canine partner examined the exterior of the isolated package for the odor of illegal controlled substances. The canine has been trained and certified in the detection, by odor, of marijuana, cocaine, crack cocaine, heroin, and methamphetamine. A blind search was conducted, where the suspicious package was placed among two similarly sized and shaped, non-suspicious packages. After this, the canine was brought in to inspect all three packages. After sniffing each package, the canine gave a positive alert for the suspicious package, while ignoring the non-suspicious packages.
- 12. The IMPD officer then applied for a search warrant to inspect the interior of the package based on the suspicious appearance of the package and the canine's positive alert. On March 14, 2017, a Marion County Superior Court Judge granted the search warrant upon a finding of probable cause.
- 13. After receiving the search warrant, task force officers opened the package. Inside, there was a large bundle covered in brown paper. Underneath, there was a layer of bubble wrap,

followed by several layers of carbon paper, all of which were sealed with packaging tape.

Officers found that the bundle consisted of a larger and smaller carbon wrapped package.

14. Upon further inspection, officers discovered that each carbon wrapped package was stuffed with stacks of rubber-banded U.S. currency, enveloped in heat and vacuum sealed bags and nestled between scented dryer sheets.



- 15. Smugglers regularly use extensive methods of packaging to conceal the presence of cash shipments in packages. Materials such as heat and vacuum sealed bags, carbon paper, and scented dryer sheets are typically used to mask the odor of illegal controlled substances. As is common with bulk cash smuggling, there was no document or correspondence detailing the purpose of the currency.
- 16. The IMPD officer and his canine partner conducted a second blind search of the package after the package had been opened. Having been allowed to sniff the currency directly,

the canine again gave a positive alert for the presence of the odor of illegal controlled substances, while ignoring the non-suspicious packages.

17. The Defendant Currency was seized, counted, and found to be \$40,020.00 in the following denominations:

Denomination	Count	Amount
\$5	266	\$1,330
\$10	475	\$4,750
\$20	1,377	\$27,540
\$50	44	\$2,200
\$100	42	\$4,200
Total:		\$40,020

- 18. It is against Federal Express policy, as stated on its website, to ship cash via Federal Express. *See* FedEx Freight FXF 100 Series Rules Tariff, *available at* https://www.fedex.com/en-us/service-guide/terms/other-services.html.
- 19. The Defendant Currency was converted into a cashier's check, and retained in the custody of ISP District 52 pending the issuance of a state turnover order. On June 13, 2017, a Marion Superior Court Judge issued a turnover order. DHS-HSI took custody of the Defendant Currency on June 21, 2017. The Defendant Currency and related property were then released into the custody of DHS-CBP on June 23, 2017.
- 20. When the Marion Superior Court issued the turnover order on June 13, 2017, it distributed a copy of the order to Natasha Johnson and Joann Johnson at the addresses listed on the package's shipping label.

#### **PERTINENT STATUTES**

- 21. Under 21 U.S.C. § 841(a)(1)-(2), it is unlawful for any person to manufacture, distribute, or dispense or possess with intent to manufacture, distribute or dispense a controlled substance.
- 22. Under 21 U.S.C. § 881(a)(6), all moneys furnished or intended to be furnished by any person in exchange for a controlled substance, all proceeds traceable to such an exchange, and all moneys used or intended to be used to facilitate any violation of the Controlled Substances Act, including 21 U.S.C. § 841(a)(1), shall be subject to forfeiture to the United States, and no property right shall exist in them.

#### **CLAIM FOR RELIEF**

23. Based on the facts alleged above, the Defendant Currency is "moneys . . . furnished or intended to be furnished by any person in exchange for a controlled substance," and/or "proceeds traceable to such an exchange," and/or "moneys . . . used or intended to be used to facilitate any violation of [the Controlled Substances Act, 21 U.S.C. § 801 *et seq.*]," and is therefore subject to forfeiture to the United States of America pursuant to Title 21, United States Code, Section 881(a)(6).

WHEREFORE, the United States prays that the Clerk of the Court issue a warrant for the arrest of the Defendant Property pursuant to Rule G(3)(b)(i) of the Supplemental Rules for Admiralty or Maritime Claims and Asset Forfeiture Actions; that due notice be given to all parties to appear and show cause why forfeiture should not be decreed; that judgment be entered declaring the Defendant Property forfeited to the United States for disposition according to law; and that the United States be granted any other just and proper relief.

Respectfully submitted,

JOSH J. MINKLER United States Attorney

By: <u>s/Eric P. Babbs</u>

Eric P. Babbs

Special Assistant United States Attorney Office of the United States Attorney 10 W. Market St., Suite 2100

Indianapolis, Indiana 46204-3048 Telephone: (317) 226-6333

Fax: (317) 226-5027

## VERIFICATION

I, Daron S. Babcock, hereby verify and declare under penalty of perjury that I am a Special Agent for Homeland Security Investigations ("HSI"), that I have read the foregoing Verified Complaint in Rem and know the contents thereof, and that the matters contained in the Complaint are true to my own knowledge, except that those matters herein stated to be alleged on information and belief, and as to those matters I believe to be true.

The sources of my knowledge and information and the grounds of my belief are the official files and records of the United States, information supplied to me by other law enforcement offices, as well as my investigation of this case, together with others, as a Special Agent with HSI.

I hereby verify and declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct.

Dated: 04 - 04 - 19

Daron S. Babcock Special Agent, HSI

# $_{ m JS~44~(Rev.~12/12)}$ case 1:19-cv-01937-JPH-DLP CPOLL COLL Filed 05/14/19 Page 1 of 2 PageID #: 10

The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replace nor supplement the filing and service of pleadings or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket sheet. (SEE INSTRUCTIONS ON NEXT PAGE OF THIS FORM.)

purpose of initiating the civil di	ocket sheet. (SEE INSTRUC	TIONS ON NEXT FAGE O	r misro	KW.)					
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VI. CAUSE OF ACTION			re filing (1	Do not cite jurisdictional state	utes unless div	versity):			
VII. REQUESTED IN COMPLAINT:	☐ CHECK IF THIS UNDER RULE 2	S IS A <b>CLASS ACTION</b> 23, F.R.Cv.P.	N D	EMAND \$		HECK YES only URY DEMAND:		complai	
VIII. RELATED CASI IF ANY	E(S) (See instructions):	JUDGE			DOCKE	T NUMBER			
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#### INSTRUCTIONS FOR ATTORNEYS COMPLETING CIVIL COVER SHEET FORM JS 44

Authority For Civil Cover Sheet

The JS 44 civil cover sheet and the information contained herein neither replaces nor supplements the filings and service of pleading or other papers as required by law, except as provided by local rules of court. This form, approved by the Judicial Conference of the United States in September 1974, is required for the use of the Clerk of Court for the purpose of initiating the civil docket sheet. Consequently, a civil cover sheet is submitted to the Clerk of Court for each civil complaint filed. The attorney filing a case should complete the form as follows:

- **I.(a) Plaintiffs-Defendants.** Enter names (last, first, middle initial) of plaintiff and defendant. If the plaintiff or defendant is a government agency, use only the full name or standard abbreviations. If the plaintiff or defendant is an official within a government agency, identify first the agency and then the official, giving both name and title.
- (b) County of Residence. For each civil case filed, except U.S. plaintiff cases, enter the name of the county where the first listed plaintiff resides at the time of filing. In U.S. plaintiff cases, enter the name of the county in which the first listed defendant resides at the time of filing. (NOTE: In land condemnation cases, the county of residence of the "defendant" is the location of the tract of land involved.)
- (c) Attorneys. Enter the firm name, address, telephone number, and attorney of record. If there are several attorneys, list them on an attachment, noting in this section "(see attachment)".
- **II. Jurisdiction.** The basis of jurisdiction is set forth under Rule 8(a), F.R.Cv.P., which requires that jurisdictions be shown in pleadings. Place an "X" in one of the boxes. If there is more than one basis of jurisdiction, precedence is given in the order shown below.

  United States plaintiff. (1) Jurisdiction based on 28 U.S.C. 1345 and 1348. Suits by agencies and officers of the United States are included here.

United States plaintiff. (1) Jurisdiction based on 28 U.S.C. 1345 and 1348. Suits by agencies and officers of the United States are included here. United States defendant. (2) When the plaintiff is suing the United States, its officers or agencies, place an "X" in this box.

Federal question. (3) This refers to suits under 28 U.S.C. 1331, where jurisdiction arises under the Constitution of the United States, an amendment to the Constitution, an act of Congress or a treaty of the United States. In cases where the U.S. is a party, the U.S. plaintiff or defendant code takes precedence, and box 1 or 2 should be marked.

Diversity of citizenship. (4) This refers to suits under 28 U.S.C. 1332, where parties are citizens of different states. When Box 4 is checked, the citizenship of the different parties must be checked. (See Section III below; **NOTE: federal question actions take precedence over diversity cases.**)

- **III. Residence (citizenship) of Principal Parties.** This section of the JS 44 is to be completed if diversity of citizenship was indicated above. Mark this section for each principal party.
- **IV. Nature of Suit.** Place an "X" in the appropriate box. If the nature of suit cannot be determined, be sure the cause of action, in Section VI below, is sufficient to enable the deputy clerk or the statistical clerk(s) in the Administrative Office to determine the nature of suit. If the cause fits more than one nature of suit, select the most definitive.
- **V. Origin.** Place an "X" in one of the six boxes.
  - Original Proceedings. (1) Cases which originate in the United States district courts.

Removed from State Court. (2) Proceedings initiated in state courts may be removed to the district courts under Title 28 U.S.C., Section 1441. When the petition for removal is granted, check this box.

Remanded from Appellate Court. (3) Check this box for cases remanded to the district court for further action. Use the date of remand as the filing date.

Reinstated or Reopened. (4) Check this box for cases reinstated or reopened in the district court. Use the reopening date as the filing date. Transferred from Another District. (5) For cases transferred under Title 28 U.S.C. Section 1404(a). Do not use this for within district transfers or multidistrict litigation transfers.

Multidistrict Litigation. (6) Check this box when a multidistrict case is transferred into the district under authority of Title 28 U.S.C. Section 1407. When this box is checked, do not check (5) above.

- VI. Cause of Action. Report the civil statute directly related to the cause of action and give a brief description of the cause. Do not cite jurisdictional statutes unless diversity. Example: U.S. Civil Statute: 47 USC 553 Brief Description: Unauthorized reception of cable service
- **VII.** Requested in Complaint. Class Action. Place an "X" in this box if you are filing a class action under Rule 23, F.R.Cv.P. Demand. In this space enter the actual dollar amount being demanded or indicate other demand, such as a preliminary injunction. Jury Demand. Check the appropriate box to indicate whether or not a jury is being demanded.
- VIII. Related Cases. This section of the JS 44 is used to reference related pending cases, if any. If there are related pending cases, insert the docket numbers and the corresponding judge names for such cases.

**Date and Attorney Signature.** Date and sign the civil cover sheet.

# UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF INDIANA INDIANAPOLIS DIVISION

UNITED STATES OF AMERICA,	)
Plaintiff,	)
v.	) Cause No. 1:19-cv-01937
\$40,020.00 UNITED STATES CURRENCY,	)
Defendant.	)
WARRANT FOR ARR	EST OF PROPERTY

## TO: ANY OFFICER OR EMPLOYEE OF THE UNITED STATES

WHEREAS a Complaint for Forfeiture In Rem has been filed in this Court on the 14th day of May, 2019, by Josh J. Minkler, United States Attorney for the Southern District of Indiana, against forty thousand and twenty dollars in United States Currency ("\$40,020.00"), defendant herein, for reasons and causes set forth in the Complaint;

YOU ARE HEREBY COMMANDED to take custody of and to deliver the defendant currency into the possession of the United States of America, to be detained in the possession of the United States or its designee until further order of this Court, and you will make return thereon not later than ten (10) days after execution of process.

Dated:	
	Laura A. Briggs, Clerk
	United States District Court
	Southern District of Indiana

Arrest Warrant to be issued by the Clerk pursuant to Rule G(3)(b)(i) of the Supplemental Rules for Admiralty or Maritime Claims and Asset Forfeiture Actions, for property in custody of the United States.